

## Species interactions in the western Baltic Sea: With focus on the ecological role of whiting - DTU Orbit (08/11/2017)

### Species interactions in the western Baltic Sea: With focus on the ecological role of whiting

The food web of the upper trophic levels in marine ecosystems is often complex, encompassing multiple biological interactions. One species may serve as prey, predator and competitor at the same time, and the interactions are likely to change with the ontogenetic development from juvenile to adult. Disentangling food web dynamics is important for both ecologists and

conservationists involved with management. Multispecies assessment models and ecosystem-based trophic models are becoming increasingly used as tools to investigate and assess biological interactions and predation impacts of key species in the food web. Furthermore, the models can be used to evaluate effects of anthropogenic activities such as fishing, eutrophication and pollution from land-based activities and shipping. Despite the growing awareness of the strength of these models to describe food web dynamics and ecosystem functioning, implementation of the models in strategic management advice for commercially important fish stocks and protected marine mammals is not common practice. This is due to the lack of sufficient information about species interactions including knowledge about the diet, food intake and growth dynamics. This thesis investigates the ecological role of whiting in the western Baltic Sea. The ecosystem is more brackish than for example the North Sea and the species diversity of the upper trophic levels is lower and the food web simpler. The main piscivorous fish species are whiting and cod, while herring and sprat are the predominant forage fishes. The growth dynamics and feeding

ecology of whiting in the western Baltic Sea has not previously been investigated, despite the fact that it is an important species both in the commercial fishery and in the food web of the North Sea. Due to differences in hydrography, species diversity and fishing pressure, the ecological role of whiting in the Baltic Sea is likely to differ considerably from that of its conspecific in the North Sea. The western Baltic Sea also provides a habitat for protected marine mammals, including the harbour porpoise, the grey seal and the harbour seal, which potentially prey on and compete for food with whiting.

Here, the growth dynamics and feeding ecology of whiting in the western Baltic Sea is investigated and discussed in an ecosystem context. Furthermore, the diet of the harbour porpoise is examined and the interactions between whiting, cod and porpoises are discussed. Describing the fish population dynamics and biological interactions of the main species at the higher trophic levels in the western Baltic Sea is an important step towards a broader regional understanding of the ecosystem dynamics. The information can be used to inform single species and multispecies assessment models for fish and ecosystem-based trophic models, and, thus, potentially improve management advice for fish stocks and protected marine mammals in the western Baltic Sea

### General information

State: Published

Organisations: National Institute of Aquatic Resources, Section for Ecosystem based Marine Management, Section for Marine Ecology and Oceanography

Authors: Ross, S. D. (Intern), Nielsen, J. R. (Intern), Gislason, H. (Intern), Andersen, N. G. (Intern)

Number of pages: 180

Publication date: 2016

### Publication information

Publisher: DTU aqua. National Institute of Aquatic Resources

Original language: English

Main Research Area: Technical/natural sciences

Publication: Research › Ph.D. thesis – Annual report year: 2016